

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L GENEVA 13183

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SHUM, SREF, EK, CM, GB, NI

SUBJECT: EQUATORIAL GUINEA REFUGEE SITUATION

REF: STATE 219749

1. IN RESPONSE TO REFTEL MISSION OFFICER CALLED ON MS.
BADIANI AND MR. KACIREK, UNHCR OFFICIALS RESPONSIBLE FOR
CENTRAL AFRICAN AFFAIRS. RESPONSES OF THE OFFICIALS ARE
KEYED TO QUESTIONS POSED IN REFTEL.

A. THERE IS A DEARTH OF FACTUAL DATA AT UNHCR HEAD-
QUARTERS ON THE SITUATION OF REFUGEES FROM EQUATORIAL
GUINEA. THERE ARE AN ESTIMATED 60,000 REFUGEES IN GABON.
A UNHCR MISSION HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED AND A CENSUS PLUS
REGISTRATION AND ISSUING OF IDENTITY CARDS IS SLOWLY
GETTING UNDERWAY. WITH THE OFFICIAL RECOGNITION OF THE
REFUGEE PROBLEM BY THE GABONESE GOVERNMENT AND A NASCENT
ASSISTANCE PROGRAM BY THE UNHCR (\$150,000 IN '78) FOR THE
REFUGEES, IT IS BELIEVED THAT THE SITUATION IS SLOWLY
IMPROVING. CAMEROON HAS AN ESTIMATED 30,000 REFUGEES,
BUT NOT MUCH IS KNOWN AT HEADQUARTERS ABOUT THEIR GENERAL
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CONDITION OR DEMOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION. THE GOC HAS TAKEN
OFFICIAL COGNIZANCE OF THE PROBLEM AND RECEIVED A UNHCR
TEMPORARY MISSION IN MAY OF THIS YEAR FOR THE PURPOSE OF
ASSESSING REFUGEE NEEDS. A SMALL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM
BY THE UNHCR OF ABOUT \$140,000 IS IN EFFECT. CONCERNING
THE SITUATION IN NIGERIA, THERE IS LITTLE INFORMATION
AT HEADQUARTERS.

B. THERE ARE NO RECENT STUDIES KNOWN TO HEADQUARTERS OF THE REFUGEES' CONDITIONS. BECAUSE OF A LACK OF DATA, THE UNHCR HAS HAD TO BEGIN PRACTICALLY FROM SCRATCH WITH A CENSUS AND REGISTRATION IN GABON WITH THE INTENTION OF UNDERTAKING A SIMILAR PROGRAM LATER IN CAMEROON.

C. COOPERATION HAS BEEN RELATIVELY GOOD BETWEEN THE UNHCR AND THE GOVERNMENTS OF GABON AND CAMEROON OVER THE PAST 18 MONTHS. IN NIGERIA THE UNHCR HAS NOT YET ATTEMPTED TO TACKLE THE PROBLEM OF THE REFUGEES, SINCE THE SITUATION IN THE OTHER TWO COUNTRIES IS MORE SERIOUS.

D. IN SIX MONTHS A CLEARER DEFINITION OF THE PROBLEM SHOULD BE KNOWN FOR GABON. DONORS MAY BE ASKED FOR CONTRIBUTIONS WHEN AN EXPANDED ASSISTANCE PROGRAM HAS BEEN FORMULATED. HEADQUARTERS SAYS IT IS STILL TOO EARLY TO COMMENT ON A TIME TABLE FOR EXPANDED ASSISTANCE TO CAMEROON. NO PLANS EXIST AT HEADQUARTERS FOR NIGERIA.

E. THE OFFICIALS SAID THAT THEY KNOW OF NO IMPEDIMENTS TO LOCAL PRIVATE ORGANIZATIONS' HELPING THE REFUGEES. IN FACT THERE HAS BEEN ASSISTANCE GIVEN TO THE REFUGEES BY THE MISSION CATHOLIQUE IN GABON FOR YEARS. IN CAMEROON A LOCAL CATHOLIC PRIVATE ORGANIZATION ALSO ASSISTED THE REFUGEES AND THE UNHCR ITSELF WAS ABLE TO CHANNEL SOME ASSISTANCE THROUGH TWO PRESBYTERIAN

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CHURCH GROUPS BETWEEN 1974-1976. WITH THE OFFICIAL RECOGNITION BY THE TWO GOVERNMENTS OF THE REFUGEE PROBLEM AND THE SIGNING OF AGREEMENTS WITH THE UNHCR, THE WAY SHOULD BE CLEAR FOR EXTERNAL PVO'S TO ASSIST.

2. THE TWO OFFICIALS AT UNHCR EXPRESSED GREAT SATISFACTION THAT AFTER A LONG PERIOD OF SILENCE AND ATTEMPTS TO HIDE THE PROBLEM ON THE PART OF THE AFRICAN GOVERNMENTS, GABON AND CAMEROON ARE NOW COOPERATING WITH THE UNHCR TO FIND WAYS OF AMELIORATING THE PLIGHT OF THE REFUGEES FROM EQUATORIAL GUINEA.
VANDEN HEUVEL

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